

# **California P-16 Council**

## **Report and Recommendations on High School Reform**

In December 2004 State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell announced he was establishing a statewide California P-16 Council to examine ways to improve student achievement at all levels and to create an integrated, seamless system of student learning from preschool through the senior year of college. The Superintendent's first task for the Council was to address the issue of high school reform.

The following report contains the purposes, goals, and background of the Council; the reasons why high school reform was assigned as the first issue; the subcommittees' essential questions; and the subcommittees' recommendations. The subcommittees' recommendations were developed through a thoughtful iterative process of consensus building. As a group the subcommittees are forwarding them to the Superintendent and other policymakers. The assignment to this group was not to analyze and debate the financial aspects of its proposals, but rather to put forth the strongest ideas for consideration by executive, legislative, and corporate leaders.

As the recommendations for high school reform emerged from the five subcommittees, the following six cross-cutting themes became apparent:

1. California's educational system must be based on high expectations for every student, with accountability for learning embedded into each grade level.
2. A seamless P-16 system is necessary to ensure postsecondary success for all students.
3. Parents, students, educators, appointed and elected officials, businesses, and the community as a whole—all these constituencies—must work together to transform the current high school system.
4. Rigorous curriculum is essential for both academic and career technical education (CTE) courses. Therefore, they must be connected and integrated rather than viewed as separate pathways with implications for different economic and social status.
5. Alignment, coordination, and articulation between three major transition points—middle school, high school, and postsecondary education—must be further strengthened.
6. The ninth grade is a crucial year for students.

## **The Purpose**

Providing California's children with the academic foundation they need to navigate tomorrow's world is a priority for State Superintendent Jack O'Connell. To support this priority, he established the California P-16 Council to coordinate and integrate preschool through college education in California more effectively to create a seamless system of student learning that would be more successful in meeting students' needs. The Council's purpose is to focus on critical issues in education and to make recommendations for educational changes that will increase student achievement in California.

## **The Goals**

The Council is charged with examining ways to improve student achievement at all levels and to link preschool, elementary school, middle school, high school, and higher education to create a comprehensive, integrated system of student learning.

The goals of the Council are to examine and make recommendations on ways to:

1. Improve student achievement at all levels and eliminate the achievement gap.
2. Link all educational levels—preschool, elementary school, middle school, high school, and higher education—to create a comprehensive, seamless system of student learning.
3. Ensure that all students have access to caring and qualified teachers.
4. Increase public awareness of the link between an educated citizenry and a healthy economy.

## **Background**

The Council is a committed group of 52 members all of whom are dedicated to improving the state's educational system. It represents a wide range of experts throughout California, including teachers, administrators, parents, business leaders, students, and academics. All members of the Council attend plenary sessions and subcommittee meetings that are held between the plenary sessions. The first plenary session was held on May 17, 2005.

The subcommittees were provided with a topic (essential questions), and they were asked to explore research-based strategies and solutions that would lead to changes in public policy. The subcommittees researched the best practices, reviewed state and national data, sought public input, and rigorously discussed issues, policies, and strategies related to their first assignment. This work yielded research-based recommendations that were presented to the entire Council and documented in a subcommittee report. The majority of the subcommittee work, most of which was carried out through conference calls, occurred between plenary sessions.

## Reasons for a Focus on High School

In 2002 only 71 percent of California students who entered high school graduated.<sup>1</sup> However, when the statewide data are disaggregated, the statistics are alarmingly worse for African-American and Latino students. Figures from 2002 show that in California only 56.6 percent of African-American and 60.3 percent of Latino students graduated.<sup>2</sup> According to researchers, graduation rates follow academic performance rates fairly closely. Students who perform poorly on California Standards Tests are far more likely to drop out of school.<sup>3</sup>

In 2004 the academic achievement of students in California's elementary schools and, to a somewhat lesser extent, California's middle schools was steadily increasing. However, the comparative academic achievement of California's high schools was significantly less. In fact, less than 10 percent of California's high schools have reached the optimum level of 800 on the Academic Performance Index (API), and during the past five years, California's high schools have met their annual API growth targets about 40 percent of the time. In 2004, 210 of California's 1,059 comprehensive high schools were state-monitored high schools, indicating unsatisfactory performance in reaching annual academic growth targets.<sup>4</sup>

Starting with the class of 2006, all public high school students are required to pass the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) to receive a high school diploma. CAHSEE also provides evidence of lower-than-acceptable achievement in many California high schools. In 2004 data from the administration of CAHSEE to students in the class of 2006 indicated that 25 percent of the students had not passed the exam. Subgroups for the class of 2006 passed at alarmingly low rates: only 39 percent of English learners, 30 percent of special education students, and 60 percent of economically disadvantaged students passed the English-language arts portion of the test.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, the issue of graduating from high school becomes even more crucial if a student applies for federal Pell Grants. The U.S. Secretary of Education recently issued the guidelines for two new federal Pell Grants: the Academic Competitiveness Grant (AC grant) and the National Science and Mathematics Access to Retain Talent Grant (SMART grant).<sup>6</sup> To qualify for these grants, students are required to graduate from a rigorous high school program of study.

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher B. Swanson, *Who Graduates in California?* Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, March 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Frey, and Mary Perry, *Spotlight on California High School Performance*. Mountain View, Calif.: EdSource, June 2005.

<sup>4</sup> *High Performing High Schools Initiative: A White Paper on Improving Student Achievement in California's High Schools*. Sacramento, California: Department of Education, February 2005.

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/eo/in/se/yr05highschoolwp.asp>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Margaret Spellings, "Letter to State Chief School Officers and State Higher Education Agencies," from the U.S. Secretary of Education, May 2, 2006.

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/ag/yr06/documents/may06item41a1.pdf>

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[Posted to the California Department of Education Web site]

As a result of the preceding facts, Superintendent O'Connell requested that the Council members focus their attention first on improving student achievement in California's high schools.

### **Essential Questions Related to High School Reform**

Five broad essential questions related to high school reform were presented to the subcommittees. The topics covered academic relevance, rigor, relationships, preparation, and academic choices. The subcommittees could expand or narrow the scope of their essential questions. The five original essential questions were:

1. How can we make the achievement of standards matter to students? This essential question was modified on September 20, 2005 to read, "How do we make school more relevant to students?"
2. How can we provide all students the opportunity to master rigorous work- and college-ready curricula?
3. How can we work to ensure that all students develop a sense of community while they are in high school?
4. How can we address the short-term problem of ninth graders entering high school unprepared to master essential content and skills?
5. How can we ensure that all students and parents are deeply aware of stakes (at the back end) and therefore the importance of academic choices (at the front end)?

### **Subcommittee Recommendations**

This section contains the essential question for each subcommittee and the recommendations resulting from the subcommittee members' discussions. The rationale for developing the recommendations is also presented.

#### **Subcommittee 1**

Essential question: How do we make school more relevant to students?

High schools must find ways to make school relevant for students. Students understand and retain more when their learning is relevant, engaging, and meaningful to their lives.<sup>7</sup> Integrating a standards-based curriculum with a career focus is a recommended instructional approach to link students' education to their future.<sup>8</sup> Connecting the curriculum to the workplace allows students the opportunity to learn real-world

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<sup>7</sup> *Learning for the 21st Century*. Washington, D.C.: Partnership for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. 2004.  
[http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/downloads/P21\\_Report.pdf](http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/downloads/P21_Report.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform*. Reston, Va.: National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004.

applications and to solve problems in a work context. This approach makes the curriculum relevant for students and engages them in learning.<sup>9</sup>

Subcommittee 1 used the following three criteria to assess whether an educational model provides relevant and engaging instruction. A successful model:

1. Promotes effective academic engagement
2. Uses contextual approaches for learning
3. Ties formal education to the broader world of career, community, and engaged citizenship

Two educational models that met the preceding criteria, the California Partnership Academies and the San Bernardino County Schools' Applications by Business and Labor for Educators program, were reviewed.

**California Partnership Academies (CPAs).** A CPA is a three-year program that spans grades ten through twelve and incorporates the following components:

- The program is structured as a school within a school.
- A close family-like atmosphere is created.
- The focus is on student achievement.
- A standards-based academic curriculum and a career-focused curriculum are integrated.
- Mentors are provided for eleventh grade students.
- Internship programs are provided. After their junior year, students performing well enough to be on track for graduation are placed in jobs.
- A common planning period for teachers is required.
- An advisory committee is established consisting of individuals involved in the academic operations of the academy and representatives from the private sector.

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<sup>9</sup> Gene Bottoms, and Karen Anthony, *Project Lead the Way: A Pre-Engineering Curriculum That Works, A New Design for High School Career/Technical Studies*. Atlanta: Southern Regional Education Board, 2005.

- Business partners are involved who:
  - Serve on a CPA steering committee that oversees the program.
  - Help to develop the career-focused curriculum.
  - Provide speakers for CPA classes.
  - Host field trips to give students a perspective of the workplace.
  - Provide mentors who serve as career-related role models and personal points of contact in the field of training.
  - Provide summer jobs and part-time jobs during the school year for students.<sup>10</sup>

CPAs have a student enrollment requirement that at least 50 percent of the students enrolled must be at risk of dropping out of high school. Even with this high at-risk student population, the success rate for students in CPAs is far above that of the state average. Data obtained during 2003-04 reveal the success rate as follows:

- In that school year, 95 percent of the twelfth graders in CPAs graduated from high school.
- In that same year 84 percent of eleventh graders and 80 percent of tenth graders completed 90 percent of their coursework.<sup>11</sup>

Students who participated in well-developed CPAs:

- Had increased grade point averages compared with students participating in other high school programs. This increase is particularly true for at-risk students.
- Had lower high school dropout rates.
- Were more likely to attend postsecondary education.
- Had a decreased need to take remedial English in college.<sup>12</sup>

### **Recommendation 1.1**

Increase the number of California Partnership Academies (CPAs), expand the model to a four-year program, eliminate the current enrollment requirement for at-risk students, and make the curriculum developed for CPAs available to the public.

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<sup>10</sup> California Partnership Academies, *Program Overview*. Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2006. <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/hs/>

<sup>11</sup> Bernie Norton, "Statistics Regarding CPA Enrollments." E-mail to Mary Donnelley-Ortega, December 6, 2005. See Appendix 1 "Summary of Data from the 2003-04 Annual Report for California Partnership Academies," which appears in the report for Subcommittee 1.

<sup>12</sup> Nan L. Maxwell, and Victor Rubin, *Career Academy Programs in California: Outcomes and Implementation*, 2001. <http://www.ucop.edu/cprc/careeracadrpt.pdf>

Specific ways to implement recommendation 1 are as follows:

- Increase the number of CPAs from the current 286 to 900.
- Expand the CPAs model from the current three-year program for grades ten through twelve to a four-year model for grades nine through twelve.
- Eliminate the 50 percent at-risk student enrollment requirement for CPAs and continue to fund qualified students in CPAs at the current rate or higher.
- Make the curriculum and lessons developed by CPAs available to the public and post them on the CDE Web site or a public database.

**Applications by Business and Labor for Educators (ABLE) program.** California needs to establish a statewide network to help high school teachers connect the curriculum to the workplace. After exploring different models and methods of applying the academic content standards to the workplace, Subcommittee 1 decided to narrow its focus to one academic subject, mathematics. The need to focus on mathematics is well supported in the research.

The San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools has a program that connects teachers with business and labor partners to create examples of authentic mathematics applications that teachers can use in their high school mathematics classes. The program, called ABLE, efficiently communicates the mathematics standards to business and labor partners so that examples of authentic mathematics applications can be easily developed. Currently only teachers in school districts in San Bernardino County have access to this program.

## **Recommendation 1.2**

Expand the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools' ABLE program throughout the state. This expansion will establish a statewide network of local business, labor, and educational partnerships to connect the mathematics curriculum to the workplace.

A statewide ABLE program will require the following components:

1. A project coordinator for each local partnership who will:
  - a. Facilitate and oversee the process and development of the authentic mathematics applications.
  - b. Oversee the compilation and archiving of the work.

2. Examples of authentic mathematics applications that will be:
  - a. Cross-referenced with the mathematics content standards and that will identify the standards used
  - b. Organized by industry sectors
  - c. Compiled in a database that resides at the local partnership, local educational agency, or Regional P-16 Council
  - d. Archived on the CDE Web site for statewide access by all educational systems
3. Funding that will be allocated to conduct a long-term evaluation of the statewide ABLE program to assess its effectiveness on student learning

For more information, see [Subcommittee 1 full report and recommendations](#).

## **Subcommittee 2**

Essential question: How can we provide all students the opportunity to master rigorous work- and college-ready curricula?

While the standards adopted for California are widely regarded as among the most rigorous in the country, California high schools often do not consistently offer rigorous courses to all students. Rigorous curriculum should not be limited to academic classes, but rather should pervade and be evident in all high school courses.

California has multiple indicators of rigor that guide the high school curriculum. Because these different indicators are not well integrated or connected, there is no consistent or widely used standard to determine whether a curriculum is rigorous.

### **Recommendation 2.1**

California must find ways to motivate, engage, and support districts, schools, and teachers to provide rigorous and challenging courses that prepare all students for higher education and work. Necessary supports might include:

- Making materials available that are aligned to the standards
- Offering monetary and technical assistance to schools and districts to develop more rigorous college- and work-preparatory courses



## Recommendation 2.2

California should align the different indicators it uses to define rigor in high school programs. A single consistent standard of rigor should be identified across all the indicators through a systematic comparative analysis across the following indicators:

- The California Standards Tests
- The California academic content standards
- The California career and technical education standards
- The California High School Exit Exam
- The “a-g” course requirements
- Local graduation requirements

## Recommendation 2.3

The process for approving courses that meet the “a-g” requirements should do more to offer clear criteria for the content of those courses. Clear criteria would:

- Help high schools to develop more rigorous courses.
- Enable better alignment between the standards for kindergarten through grade twelve and the requirements for CSU or UC admission and placement.
- Ensure that the “a-g” designations are consistently applied.

For more information, see [Subcommittee 2 full report and recommendations](#).

## Subcommittee 3

Essential question: How can we work to ensure that all students develop a sense of community while they are in high school?

California’s high schools must have the resources to create learning communities in which all students will feel connected, supported, and empowered. Students who experience their school as a caring community are more motivated and engaged in their learning. Communities “are organized around relationships and ideas.”<sup>13</sup> These

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<sup>13</sup> Thomas Sergiovanni, *Leadership for the Schoolhouse: How Is It Different? Why Is It Important?* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1996.

relationships include student-to-student, student-to-adult, and student-to-community interconnectedness. Positive connections between students and teachers, coupled with high expectations, promote academic success.<sup>14</sup> Implementing programs that enhance a student's sense of belonging to a community will increase the likelihood that a student will succeed academically and in the workplace and as a contributor to the community.

### **Recommendation 3.1**

Support recommendation 4.2, from Subcommittee 4 of the California P-16 Council, to develop a transition plan from middle school to high school for the approximately 500,000 eighth grade students in California.

### **Recommendation 3.2**

Support local, regional, and state collaborations to increase multiple pathways to school graduation that promote success in college and work. Provide educational options (other than those exclusively tied to the “a-g” requirements) to attract and retain students and prepare them for college and career.

### **Recommendation 3.3**

Design and fund a continuum of research-based high school transition plans that:

- Connect students to a variety of career paths and postsecondary education.
- Engage students and school staff on a regular and ongoing basis.
- Include strategies for the successful transition between grade levels and life beyond high school.
- Provide flexibility for implementation at the local level.
- Can be offered in the summer and on Saturdays during the school year.

### **Recommendation 3.4**

Provide schools, school districts, and county offices of education with pertinent information and tools to support school community safety and violence prevention.

For more information, see [Subcommittee 3 full report and recommendations](#).

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<sup>14</sup> Kathleen Cotton, “*School Size, School Climate, and Student Performance*.” (SIRS Close-Up #20). Portland, Ore.: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, May 1996.

## **Subcommittee 4**

Essential question: How can we address the short-term problem of ninth graders entering high school unprepared to master essential content and skills?

In the long run, success in high school would be greatly enhanced if an academic or a career plan or both, starting in middle school through the postsecondary level, were required for all students. The plan must identify the college or career pathway, or both, associated with each student's goals and be reviewed annually and modified as needed throughout high school.

Results from the 2005 California Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) test reveal that 28 percent of California eighth grade students scored below basic or far below basic on the California Standards Test (CST) in English-language arts. The CST in general mathematics for the eighth grade showed 41 percent of the students scoring below basic or far below basic and 37 percent scoring below basic or far below basic in Algebra I.<sup>15</sup>

An alarming number of California students are entering high school with below basic or far below basic scores in English-language arts and mathematics. Immediate actions are needed to ensure that these students succeed in high school. It is deemed crucial as a central strategy, to create a formal transition program from middle school to high school and to restructure the ninth grade to provide a more personalized environment with smaller classes and counseling support. Finally, appropriate academic interventions and safety nets must be put in place to accelerate the learning of students who are entering high school unprepared to succeed in a rigorous course of study.

### **Recommendation 4.1**

School districts shall provide research-based, state-funded bridge programs for exiting eighth graders who are below basic or far below basic on the California Standards Tests (CSTs) in English-language arts (ELA) or mathematics or both. Participation is mandatory for those students who are far below basic.

### **Recommendation 4.2**

Grade nine shall be structured as a “transition-year program” designed to promote personalization and the ability of teachers to know students well. To this end, currently available funding for class-size reduction for all ninth grade students shall be enhanced to ensure small classes for all four core academic areas (English, mathematics, science and social studies).

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<sup>15</sup> California Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR): All Students, California Standards Test Scores—2005. Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2005.

### **Recommendation 4.3**

State funding shall be allocated to develop and implement academic interventions for ninth grade students who are not yet proficient on the CST in ELA or algebra.

### **Recommendation 4.4**

Funding shall be provided for a ninth grade counselor dedicated to every 250 students who are below basic or far below basic in ELA or mathematics or both. The counselor shall be responsible for developing and monitoring interventions for those students.

For more information, see [Subcommittee 4 full report and recommendations](#).

### **Subcommittee 5**

Essential question: How can we ensure that all students and parents are deeply aware of stakes (at the back end) and therefore the importance of academic choices (at the front end)?

The challenge for California is to support the expansion of opportunities for all students in the P-16 system. It is crucial that parents and students understand the vast array of possible choices available in the high school years. To accomplish this task, a comprehensive, long-term public awareness campaign for parents and students must be created that has the following components:

1. It creates a message that:
  - a. Promotes and supports education and high academic expectations for target groups from birth through high school, with the goal of enabling more students to attend and graduate from college
  - b. Promotes and supports a culture for targeted groups that is oriented toward college attendance and career development
  - c. Demystifies and explains the rules of the educational process to parents and students
  - d. Provides tangible benchmarks to determine students' success from the early grades through high school (e.g., "a-g" coursework, standards, performance levels, and so forth)
  - e. Promotes and supports family involvement at home, with the educational institution, and in the broader community (e.g., collaboration across social, private, and public institutions)
  - f. Provides information to parents regarding financial resources and support available to their children for postsecondary education

2. It identifies targeted audiences of parents and students with historically low graduation rates and the least success with school and academic achievement (e.g., African American/Black, Latino-Chicano/Hispanic, disaggregated sub-groups of Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander populations, American Indian/Native American, socioeconomically disadvantaged groups, migrant populations in which the primary home language is not English, and in families whose literacy levels are low).
3. It produces products and provides services to transmit the message that are parent-friendly and in the primary language of the home and are delivered attractively through multimedia and interactive formats that engage parents in two-way communications (e.g., radio, television, magazines, public service advertisements, brochures, pamphlets, newsletters, conferences, parent centers, and so forth)

### **Recommendation 5.1**

The California Department of Education should develop, in conjunction with allied partners, a long-term, multimedia, parent-friendly campaign to make parents aware and involved. It should contain the three components listed previously.

### **Recommendation 5.2**

The California Department of Education, in conjunction with the Legislative Analyst's Office, should conduct a thorough review and an analysis of the gaps in existing parent awareness and involvement programs. From that analysis, a long-term plan should be developed to implement and fund recommendation 5.1.

### **Recommendation 5.3**

The California State Legislature should establish a permanent long-term funding mechanism and infrastructure to support the work of the statewide and regional P-16 Councils so that state and regional work are aligned, local context is incorporated, and community partnerships are cohesively fostered.

For more information, see [Subcommittee 5 full report and recommendations](#).

## **2005-06 California P-16 Council Members**

Barry Munitz, (Chair), Trustee Professor, California State University, Los Angeles

Arlene Ackerman, Superintendent of San Francisco Unified School District

Carrie Allen, Principal of Claremont High School, Claremont Unified School District

Richard Alonzo, Superintendent of Local District 4, Los Angeles Unified School District

Terry Anderson, Representative for Don Perata, Majority Leader of the California State Senate

Catherine Atkin, President of Preschool California

Manny Barbara, Superintendent of Oak Grove School District, San Jose

Marlene Canter, Vice President of Los Angeles Unified School District's Board of Education

Dorothy Chu, Teacher, Montebello Unified School District

Sandy Clifton-Bacon, Director of Curriculum, Beverly Hills Unified School District

John Couch, Vice President for Education, Apple Computer, Inc.

Judy D'Amico, Member of the Board of Directors, Sacramento Metro Chamber of Commerce

Shelley Davis, Director of California GEAR UP

Mark Drummond, Chancellor of California Community Colleges

Herb Fischer, Superintendent of San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools

Jack Gordon, Chair of United States Hospice Foundation

Jody Graf, Principal of Jonas Salk Middle School, San Juan Unified School District, Sacramento

MRC Greenwood, Provost, University of California, Office of the President

Carl Guardino, President and CEO of Silicon Valley Leadership Group

Gary Hart, Founder of California State University Institute of Education Reform, CSU, Sacramento

Dián Hasson, Teacher, Butte College

Bob Hudson, Superintendent of Alpaugh Unified School District, Tulare County

Bill Jackson, President and CEO of Great Schools, Inc.

Allison Jones, Assistant Vice Chancellor, California State University, Office of the Chancellor

Sherry Lansing, Regent for University of California, University of California Board of Regents

Harold Levine, Dean of School of Education, University of California, Davis

Jo Loss, Vice President of California State Parent Teacher Association

Manny Marantal, Account Manager for Microsoft Corporation

Patty Martel, Principal of George Moscone Elementary School, San Francisco Unified School District

Brian McInnis, Student, University of California, Davis

Skip Meno, Dean of College of Education, California State University, San Diego

Stanley Murphy, Teacher of the Year, San Diego High School, San Diego Unified School District

Linda Murray, Superintendent in Residence, Education Trust West

KimOanh Nguyen-Lam, Board Member of Garden Grove Unified School District

Fabian Núñez, Speaker of California State Assembly

Martha Penry, President of California School Employees Association

Don Perata, Majority Leader of California State Senate

Scott Plotkin, Executive Director of California School Boards Association

Carol Rava Treat, Senior Policy Officer for Education, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

Rhonda Rios-Kravitz, Librarian, Head of Access Services, Library, California State University, Sacramento

Luis Rodriguez, Former Member of the California State Board of Education

Alan Siegel, Teacher of the Year, W.C. Carlé Continuation High School, Konocti Unified School District

Rick Simpson, Representative for Fabian Núñez, Speaker of California State Assembly

Diane Siri, Superintendent of Santa Cruz County Office of Education/ Executive Director of ARCHES

Anne Stanton, Director of Youth Programs of James Irvine Foundation

Carroll Stevens, Senior Fellow of Foundation Legacy Development, Stupski Foundation

Jack Stewart, President of California Manufacturers and Technology Association/Bay Area Economic Forum

Suzanne Tacheny, Former Member of the California State Board of Education

Peter Thorp, Principal of Gateway High School, San Francisco Unified School District

Carol Tomlinson-Keasey, Chancellor of University of California, Merced

Kendall Ann Vaught, Teacher, Oak Middle School, Los Alamitos Unified School District

Curtis Washington, Teacher, San Mateo Union High School District

Marcy Whitebook, Director of the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Joyce Wright, Assistant Superintendent of Sacramento County Office of Education



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